

PUSHED TO THE BRINK

Exploring and combating the prevalence of bullying in Kentucky schools and communities

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An outgoing, athletic and curious 11-year-old child, Carl Walker-Hoover had his whole life ahead of him. He was an avid reader; he swam, rollerbladed, played soccer and football. He made it a point to look out for his younger brother and kissed his grandma every night before bed. But one March evening in 2009, his mother, Sirdeaner Walker, came home to discover Carl hanging by an extension cord in the third-floor landing of their Massachusetts family home. Carl had taken his own life in an act of what is now becoming known as bullycide.

Carl had been the target of bullying from the first day he entered middle school in September 2008. Students called him, “gay,” saying he must be gay because he acted like a girl, his mother said in a 2009 TheBostonChannel.com interview. She said the berating, teasing and taunting Carl endured day after day eventually took a toll on her son.

In Dan Olweus’ book, “Bullying Among Schoolchildren: Intervention and Prevention,” he said, “It does not require much imagination to understand what it is to go through the school years in a state of more or less permanent anxiety and insecurity, and with poor self-esteem. It is not surprising that the victims’ devaluation of themselves sometimes becomes so overwhelming that they see suicide as the only possible solution.”

Nicholasville Police Sgt. Scott Harvey doesn’t want to see that happen. “My point to [kids] is, ‘If you know [bullying] is going on and you don’t say anything, my fear is that you’ll be standing at a funeral one day, wishing you had said something,’” Harvey said. >>



▲ Carl Walker-Hoover, 11, committed suicide in his Massachusetts home after being repeatedly bullied at school throughout his entire sixth grade year.

PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

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